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ABSTRACT

This paper reports data from two studies on the behavioral assessment of social competence in college males which look at how well the male initiates interaction with a female in a "boy meets girl" situation. The goal is to determine the types of social behavior which will differentiate between a group of anxious, non-dating, or low social-competence, college men (LSC), and a group of non-anxious, socially active, or high social-competence college men (HSC). The first study examined behaviors associated with social delivery such as eye contact, pauses, and amount of talking. The second study looked at stylistic behaviors associated with social manner such as self-disclosure, use of verbal reinforcements, and the type of content used within a social interaction. The studies employed several levels of assessment in the definition of social competence, ranging from self-report to peer rating to direct observation of behavior. The subjects were 35 unmarried male undergraduates. Group differences on the behavioral measures of social competence suggest that the latency or timing and length of social responses tend to discriminate between HSC and LSC subjects. None of the stylistic or content measures coded on the male subjects' behavior are able to discriminate significantly between LSC and HSC groups. (Author)

Patricia Hines

Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Psychological Association, 1973

SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND INCOMPETENCE: A COMPARISON OF CONVERSATIONAL CONTENT AND STYLE

In the present paper, I will be reporting data from two studies on the behavioral assessment of social competence in college males. Social competence, broadly defined, refers to an individual's ability to manage his social interactions in a fashion that provides him with a sense of comfort, accomplishment, and emotional satisfaction. In the present studies, we have restricted ourselves to investigating one aspect of social competence which is important in college men's failure to date. We have chosen to look at how well the male handles the initials of an interaction with a female--the "boy meets girl" situation.

Most research which attempts to assess individual differences in social competence has relied on the development of questionnaire measures for this purpose (e.g. Dixon et al., 1957; Lanyon, 1967; Effran and Karn, 1969; and Watson and Friend, 1969). A few other investigators have looked at socially competent performances in terms of general interpersonal style. Argyle (1967), for example, has suggested that the socially effective person has learned a repertoire of techniques for influencing another individual's social behavior. Agyris (1965) and Watkins (1972) draw on the group process consultation literature to describe the socially competent individual as a person who conveys a large amount of information about his own experiences, interests, and feelings to his partners in social interaction.

The present studies focus on identifying specific behaviors which can be used in a behavioral definition of social competence in college males. The research strategy involves determining the types of social behavior which will differentiate between a group of anxious, non-dating college men and a group of

non-anxious, socially active college men. The first study looked at overt behaviors associated with social delivery, such as eye contact, pauses, and amount of talking. The second study looked at more stylistic behaviors associated with social manner, such as self-disclosure, use of verbal reinforcements, and type of content used within a social interaction. It was hoped that the results of these two behavioral analyses would provide information on the behaviors that are effective or ineffective in heterosexual interactions. Such information could be used in designing specific behavioral treatment programs for college men with dating problems. In addition, the studies attempted to employ several levels of assessment, ranging from self report to peer rating to direct observation of behavior, in the definition of social competence.

STUDY I

Method

Subjects: The subjects in this study were 35 unmarried male undergraduates from the University of Oregon who were paid $3.00 for their participation in the study. Subjects were selected on the basis of their responses to a Social Activity Questionnaire (SAQ) distributed in large undergraduate classes. Individuals who qualified for inclusion in the study were contacted by telephone or letter and invited to participate.

Responses to the SAQ were precoded into specific answers. Subjects who were classified as low in social competence (LSC) reported that they had had three or fewer dates in the last six months, one or fewer dates in the last month, felt somewhat or very anxious and inhibited in their interactions with girls, and wanted to date somewhat or more frequently. Subjects who were identified as high in social competence (HSC) reported that they had had twelve or more dates

in the last six months, four or more dates in the last month, felt relaxed and comfortable in their interactions with girls, and wanted to date no more frequently. There were 15 subjects in the LSC group and 20 subjects in the HSC group.

Procedure: The assessment battery will be described in the order in which the tests were administered:

1) Questionnaire Measures: Subjects were given the Social Anxiety and Distress (SAD) and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) Scales, developed by Watson and Friend (1969). Subjects also responded to an Inventory of Attitudes Toward Specific Situations, indicating their personal reactions and feelings toward five hypothetical social situations (e.g., calling up a girl for a date). This test was modeled after Endler, Hunt, and Rosenstein's (1962) S-R Inventory of Anxiousness.

2) Taped Situation Test: This procedure was adapted from an assessment measure derived by Rehm and Marston (1968). The TST consisted of 10 social situations enacted on audiotape. The items were presented by a male voice which described the situation involving a girl (e.g., "At a party you go over to a girl and ask her to dance."). A female voice then read a line of dialogue (e.g., "I'm not much of a dancer.") to which the male had to respond aloud after a signal (e.g., "Actually, neither am I."). The subjects were instructed to respond as they would in real life situations. Their answers were recorded on audiotape by a second tape recorder.

3) In Vivo Interaction: In this task, subjects were asked to interact with a female experimental confederate for 10 minutes. The subjects were instructed to act as if this interaction was a "real" social situation, imagining that they had just met the confederate socially and wanted to carry on a

conversation with her. Trained coders observed the interaction through a one-way mirror, recording the number of smiles and head nods and the amount of eye contact used by the male subject. The entire 10 minute conversation was recorded on audiotape.

The female confederates employed in the in vivo interaction were instructed to be moderately positive with all subjects. In order to make the male subjects responsible for structuring the conversation, the confederates were trained to limit their utterances to five seconds or less and to avoid initiating any topic of conversation unless there was a lag in the interaction of ten seconds or more.

Three female confederates were used in the in vivo interaction. Because of difficulty in scheduling subjects, the female confederates were not equally distributed across the HSC and LSC groups. The programming of the female's behavior may partially offset this imbalance.

4) Telephone call to female: Immediately after the in vivo interaction, the female went to another room. The subjects were instructed to telephone the girl (who was in an adjoining room with a connected telephone) and ask her out for a date. A maximum time limit of five minutes was imposed on the length of the call and the entire conversation was tape recorded. In this task, the female was again programmed to respond to all subjects in a moderately positive fashion and to accept the date. All subjects understood that the female was a confederate in the experiment and that the date would not actually occur.

5) Peer Ratings: Peer rating forms were devised to get an evaluation of the subjects' social skill and social comfort from people who had opportunities to observe their naturalistic social behavior. Written consent was obtained from the subjects to send these questionnaires to individuals whose

names they provided. In each case, we requested the names of two males and two females who knew the subject reasonably well.

Measures: From pilot data, a number of measures were derived to score the performance tests. These measures are described in Table 1. Reliability data was computed on all measures which required more than simple counting.

Results:

A summary of the means, t comparisons, and reliabilities for all measures is presented in Table 2. Significance was determined by one-tailed tests when a clear difference could be postulated between the LSC and HSC groups, and by two-tailed tests when expectations for group differences were less precise. The different N's for different tasks are due entirely to equipment problems (e.g., tape recorder malfunctioning) rather than to any systematic source of bias.

The first question to be examined is the extent to which the Social Activity Questionnaire truly selected high and low socially competent subjects. The highly significant differences between the HSC and LSC groups on the SAD, FNE, and Inventory of Attitudes Toward Specific Situations confirm the fact that we have at least selected individuals who are very relaxed or very anxious in social situations involving dateable women. The significant group differences on the Peer Rating Form questions similarly provide strong evidence that subjects in the HSC and LSC categories are noticeably different in their real world social interactions. Subjects in the LSC group are perceived by their friends as relatively socially naive and ineffective. Peer ratings also verify that LSC subjects date much less frequently than HSC subjects. As a further check on the factors involved in group assignment, undergraduate assistants were asked to rate the physical attractiveness of each subject. There were no differences in physical attractiveness between subjects in the HSC and LSC groups.

Measures based on the three experimental tasks involving behavioral samples of social competence were generally less successful in demonstrating differences

between HSC and LSC subjects. The audiotape situations test proved to be the most discriminating task. LSC subjects showed a significantly longer response latency and gave significantly shorter responses to the TST. In the in vivo interaction, which is the most realistic task for demonstrating social competence, only the number of 10 second silences could significantly differentiate the HSC and LSC groups. HSC subjects tended to talk more than LSC subjects, but this difference did not achieve statistical significance. There were no significant group differences on the number of head nods and smiles or the amount of eye contact used by male subjects. None of the measures on the telephone call task could significantly discriminate between the HSC and LSC categories, although here again group means on the amount of male talk time indicated that HSC subjects spoke more than LSC subjects.

The pattern of group differences on the behavioral measures of social competence suggests that the latency or timing of social responses and the length of social responses tends to discriminate between HSC and LSC subjects. This finding fits well with a commonsense view of the socially incompetent individual as hesitant and constricted in his social interactions. Two possible explanations can be formulated for such behavior. Long pauses and short statements may be caused by an individual's not knowing what to say in a social interaction, or may occur because excessive anxiety makes it aversive for the person to speak. To understand the dynamics of social incompetence, we must sort out whether performance differences between HST and LSC individuals are due to differences in social skill or social anxiety. An adequate definition of social competence must determine whether behavioral differences between HSC and LSC subjects are more likely to occur in aspects of social interactions requiring social know-how or in aspects of social interaction that are easily disrupted by anxiety.

Study II attempts a more fine-grained analysis of behavioral differences between HSC and LSC subjects. The 10 minute in vivo interaction between the male subject

and the female confederate is an excellent source of data on such differences, since the parameters of this task are similar to the parameters of real world social behavior. Study II therefore examines a number of specific social competence measures--including further measures of interpersonal style and additional measures reflecting the content of the conversation--which can be derived from the in vivo interaction. It also includes a global measure indicating how undergraduate girls rate each subject's social competence. This study was designed to look at a number of aspects of social interaction, including several specific behaviors that seemed rather unambiguously related to the subject's degree of learned social skill.

STUDY II

Method

Subjects: The subjects in this study were the first 14 HSC and the first 14 LSC subjects run through the assessment battery described in Study I.

Procedure: The audiotape recording of the ten minute in vivo interaction for each subject was analyzed for general effectiveness and for a variety of stylistic and content measures of social competence.

Measures:

1) Social Anxiety and Distress Scale: Scores on the SAD scale were compared for the HSC and LSC subjects included in this study.

2) Global ratings of social competence: Seven undergraduate girls listened to each taped in vivo interaction and attempted to judge whether the male subject would be considered to be high or low in social competence. The girls were given no training on how to make this discrimination. They were simply instructed to use any standard of social competence that seemed meaningful to them to assign the subject to a high, low, or can't say social competence category.

3) Specific measures of social competence: Trained coders also listened to each in vivo interaction, analyzing the tape for specific measures of social

competence. These social competence measures were derived partly from the literature on social effectiveness and partly from the investigator's a priori impressions after listening to taped interactions from a pilot study. The social competence measures are summarized in Table 3. Four of the measures were intended to detect interpersonal style, and looked at 1) the number of verbal reinforcement, such as "good" or "mmhm" used while the partner was speaking; 2) the degree of self disclosure; 3) the pacing of the conversation, measured in terms of the number of male-female exchanges, and 4) the number of topics covered in the conversation. The last set of measures was designed to describe the content of the interaction. These measures recorded 1) the amount of time the male spent in adding new information to the interaction versus the amount of time he spent in simply responding to the female's statements; 2) the degree to which the male relied on statements, questions, or responding to his partner's questions for adding new information to the interaction; and 3) the male's tendency to talk about himself, his partner, other people, or objects during the conversation. The female confederate's behavior was also coded on stylistic and content measures.

Results:

A summary of the means, t comparisons, and reliabilities for all measures used in Study II is presented in Table 4. In this study, as in Study I, highly significant differences on the SAD scale suggest that subjects in the LSC group are much more socially anxious than subjects in the HSC group. Global ratings of social competence made on these subjects by a group of undergraduate girls indeed describe the LSC subjects as significantly less competent than the HSC subjects. This finding supports the assumption that the in vivo interaction captures a meaningful sample of heterosexual behavior. It also substantiates the assumption that the LSC and HSC categories tap judgements that are meaningful to girls within the college dating population.

Both SAD scores and global ratings of social competence were significantly correlated with dating frequency, as measured by the Social Activity Questionnaire. (For SAD scores, $r = .74$, $p < .001$; for rated social competence, $r = .47$, $p < .01$). The correlation between SAD scores and rated social competence was somewhat weaker and only approached statistical significance ($r = .37$, $p < .10$). The slippage in these correlations can be accounted for by a few subjects who were markedly out of place on the SAD or rated social competence measures. Although most of the LSC subjects obtained SAD scores that depicted them as socially anxious, three LSC subjects obtained SAD scores falling within the range of SAD scores obtained by HSC subjects. No HSC subject had an SAD score indicating social anxiety. On the rated social competence measure, the only subject to be rated as high in social competence by all seven undergraduate girls came from the LSC group. Two other subjects from the LSC group had rated social competence scores equal to or above the mean rated competence score for HSC subjects, while two HSC subjects had scores below the mean for the LSC group. A few subjects in the study thus are exceptions to the rule that low dating frequency goes hand-in-hand with high social anxiety and/or low social skill.

Even when these exceptions are taken into account, the lack of group differences on the behavioral measures of social competence is quite striking. None of the stylistic or content measures coded on the male subject's behavior are able to significantly discriminate between the LSC and HSC groups. One stylistic measure of social competence coded on the female confederate's behavior, per cent of statements containing low self disclosure, shows group differences that are significant at the .05 level. Confederates paired with HSC males tend to engage in more self disclosure than do confederates paired with LSC males. One content measure coded on the female's behavior, per cent of utterances containing object content, is also able to significantly differentiate between the two experimental

groups. It should be noted, however, that two significant results in twenty-three t tests is not appreciably above the number of significant results which could have been expected by chance.

To provide a final, exhaustive test for group differences between HSC and LSC subjects, a discriminant function analysis was used to determine if any combination of measures of social competence could be used to predict the dichotomous criterion of inclusion in the high or low social competence groups. Fourteen measures, including SAD scores, raters' judgements of social competence scores, and scores on the stylistic and content measures of social competence, were employed as potential predictor variables in this analysis. Only two of these fourteen measures, SAD scores and raters' judgements of social competence scores, emerged as significant predictors of social competence grouping.

We now have two studies, using different types of behavioral measures of social competence, which show few specific behavioral differences between LSC and HSC individuals. These results cannot rule out the possibility that specific differences do exist. Other behaviors, such as vocal intonation, facial expression, appropriate gestures, or vivid use of language, may be more salient in determining social competence. The results of these two studies do, however, suggest that defining social competence in terms of overt behavior is not an easy or intuitive task. Our assessment studies show that peer ratings and ratings by undergraduate girls can discriminate between HSC and LSC men--but these two ratings were set up as "kitchen-sink" measures which could include perceived social skill, perceived social anxiety, and, in the peer ratings, some amount of stereotyping from the prior knowledge that the subject did or did not date. Two other investigators, who attempted to limit global effectiveness ratings to social skill per had difficulty in demonstrating differences between HSC and LSC men. Rehm and Marston (1968) found that a sample of college men applying for a dating skills training

program was not significantly different from a control sample of college men on a global rating of social skill. At the conclusion of the training program, however, these men were rated as significantly more skillful than at the start of the program. Valentine, in the study to be presented next, similarly found no differences in rated social skill between a sample of socially anxious and socially comfortable men.

Arkowitz, Lichtenstein, and McGovern (1971) have described two general types of social inhibition, involving varying degrees of skill and anxiety. In the first type, the socially inhibited individual is basically deficient in learned social skills. Because the individual lacks social skill, he behaves inappropriately in many social situations. Such inappropriate behavior causes him to receive critical feedback from individuals in his social environment, making him apprehensive of further interpersonal contacts. This social anxiety prevents the individual from learning more adaptive patterns of social behavior, and frequently instills in him a self fulfilling concept of social inferiority. In the second type of social inhibition, the individual is basically socially skilled, but has learned to be unduly anxious in interpersonal situations. This social anxiety often interferes with the individual's skilled performance in social situations, and leads him to avoid potentially rewarding interpersonal encounters.

The present studies cannot categorically say that social incompetence is due primarily to lack of social skill or presence of social anxiety. However, these studies do suggest that social anxiety and other factors such as avoidance of social situations and negative self evaluation play a sizeable role in determining social incompetence. The difference in presentation between HSC and LSC subjects, which has proved so frustrating to pin down, may in some individuals reflect a lack of learned social skills, in other individuals high social anxiety, and in still other individuals a combination of anxiety and social skill deficit. The behavior therapist working with non-dating clients must either carefully assess

his clients on an individual basis, or employ a group treatment strategy that departs from the social skill training model. Papers by McGovern (1973) and Christensen (1973) present examples of such group treatment programs. The fact that peers or undergraduate girls are the most discriminating judges of social competence argues persuasively for the use of group treatment or undergraduate therapy aides for providing feedback on social performance.

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TABLE 1: Summary of Derived Measures for Social Performance Tasks*

1. Taped Situation Test (TST)	a. Mean latency - time from signal to S's response b. Mean number of words per response
2. In Vivo - 10 minute conversation	a. Amount of male talk time b. Amount of female talk time c. Number of silences of 10 seconds or more d. S gazing behavior - amount of time spent by each S looking at the female confederate e. Number of head nods by S f. Number of smiles by S
3. Telephone Conversation	a. Amount of male talk time b. Amount of female talk time c. Length of conversation
4. Peer Ratings	a. Peer's estimate of S's dating frequency b. Peer's mean response to 14 true - false items on S's social skill c. Peer's rating of S's social skill (0 - 10 scale, 0 = low skill, 10 = high skill)

*All measures involving judgments as opposed to direct counting were done by different pairs of female raters who were blind to the purposes of the experiment and to the Ss' assignment to groups.

TABLE 2: Summary of Means, t Tests, and Reliabilities for Measures Comparing HSC & LSC Subjects in Study I.

	Measure	$\bar{X}_{HSC}$	N_{HSC}	$\bar{X}_{LSC}$	N_{LSC}	t	P	Reliability
I.	Questionnaires							
	A. SAD	23.75	20	13.07	15	6.08	<.001[1]	
	B. FNE	22.15	20	11.27	15	5.28	<.001[1]	
	C. S-R Inventory of Anxiousness	16.40	20	4.63	15	3.90	<.001[1]	
II.	TST							
	A. Latency	19.55	20	31.60	15	2.61	<.02[2]	
	B. Number of Words	19.95	20	11.76	15	2.72	<.02[2]	
III.	In Vivo							
	A. Amount Male Talk Time	347.95	20	300.13	15	1.59	NS	.97
	B. Amount Female Talk Time	119.25	20	114.13	15	0.25	ns	.95
	C. Number of 10 Second Silences	0.20	20	1.53	15	2.59	<.05[2]	
	D. Gazing	304.35	20	262.93	15	1.10	ns	.92
	E. Head Nods	11.50	20	15.93	15	1.41	ns	.82
	F. Smiles	19.10	20	26.47	15	1.67	ns	.91
IV.	Telephone							
	A. Amount Male Talk Time	58.11	18	40.23	13	1.66	ns	.98
	B. Amount Female Talk Time	15.60	10	13.89	9	0.33	ns	.93
	C. Length of Conversation	82.69	18	62.69	13	1.33	ns	
V.	Peer Ratings							
	A. Dating Frequency	3.56	18	2.45	13	3.96	<.001[1]	
	B. Mean True-False	12.48	18	8.04	13	3.69	<.005[1]	
	C. Social Effectiveness Rating	8.13	18	5.54	13	3.40	<.005[1]	

[1]One tail test
[2]Two tail test

TABLE 3: Summary of Measures Used in the Further Analysis of the In Vivo Conversation*

Stylistic Measures	a. Number of verbal reinforcements b. Percentage of statements involving only low self disclosure c. Number of utterances d. Number ot topic changes expressed as a percentage of number of utterances
Content Measures	a. Substantive content - percentage of utterances in which speaker adds information to conversation b. Statement content - percentage of utterances in which speaker supplys information not directly requested by partner c. Question content - percentage of utterances in which speaker requests partner to supply information d. Response content - percentage of utterances in which speaker supplys information requested by partner e. Self content - percentage of utterances in which speaker supplys information about himself or requests partner to supply information about herself f. Partner content - percentage of utterances in which speaker supplys information about partner or requests partner to supply information about himself g. Other people content - percentage of utterances in which speaker supplys or requests partner to supply information about other people h. Object content - percentage of utterances in which speaker supplies or requests partner to supply information about objects

* All measures were coded on both the male subject's and female confederate's conversational behavior. Each stylistic measure was rated by a different pair of female raters who were blind to the purposes of the experiment and to the Ss' assignment to groups. The content coding was done by five female raters who were similarly uninformed about the experiment.

TABLE 4: Summary of Means, t Tests, and Reliabilities for Measures Comparing HSC & LSC Subjects in Study II.

Measure	$\bar{X}_{HSC}$	N_{HSC}	$\bar{X}_{LSC}$	N_{LSC}	Pt	P	Reliability
SAD	23.57	14	13.00	14	5.62	<.001[1]	
Rated Social Competence	2.29	14	1.73	14	2.70	<.01[1]	.68
Stylistic Measures							
Male							
Verbal Reinforcements	4.14	14	6.43	14	1.07	ns	.74
Self Disclosure	83.78	14	89.27	14	1.54	ns	.94
Number of Utterances	41.93	14	36.57	14	1.30	ns	.95
Topic Changes	0.38	14	0.38	14	0.05	ns	.81
Female							
Verbal Reinforcements	11.86	14	14.50	14	1.07	ns	.74
Self Disclosure	91.25	14	95.56	14	2.27	<.05	.94
Number of Utterances	41.25	14	36.07	14	1.25	ns	.95
Topic Changes	0.08	14	0.12	14	1.84	ns	.81
Content Measures							
Male							
% Substantive	91.81	14	92.32	14	0.34	ns	.76
% Statement	57.16	14	56.60	14	0.12	ns	.76
% Question	25.95	14	29.41	14	0.80	ns	.76
% Response	8.70	14	6.07	14	1.58	ns	.76
% Self	48.97	14	49.01	14	0.01	ns	.76
% Partner	3.31	14	2.93	14	0.53	ns	.76
% Other People	13.46	14	11.20	14	1.25	ns	.76
% Objects	26.04	14	28.41	14	1.87	ns	.76
Female							
% Substantive	90.74	14	91.21	14	0.21	ns	.76
% Statemsne	47.59	14	47.06	14	0.15	ns	.76
% Question	11.99	14	9.36	14	1.03	ns	.76
% Response	31.15	14	34.78	14	0.89	ns	.76
% Self	53.70	14	49.48	14	0.96	ns	.76
% Partner	1.72	14	1.87	14	0.21	ns	.76
% Other People	11.04	14	8.88	14	0.78	ns	.76
% Object	23.57	14	30.91	14	2.14	<.05[2]	.76

[1]One Tail Test
[2]Two Tail Test